

The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 35 No. 5

Sen

Success At Long Last!

FRA Obligates Funds for Most New York State High-Speed Rail Projects

On Friday, September 23, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced the obligation of \$149.3 million in HSR funds for the majority of the previously awarded HSR improvement projects, including the long-sought second Albany to Schenectady main track.

The announcement came just one week before the end of the FY '11 federal budget year and a full year ahead of the September 30, 2012 mandated deadline for obligation of all American Recovery and Reinvestment Act High Speed Rail funds. Reportedly, the concerted efforts of both Senator Charles Schumer and Representative Louise Slaughter, urging all the involved parties (including CSX, Amtrak, FRA, NYSDOT) to reach the necessary final agreements as quickly as possible, was instrumental in the obligation announcement occurring in a timely manner.

The obligated funds will allow the following projects to now move forward:

* Construction of 17 miles of new and upgraded second main track between Albany and Schenectady, to be operated at speeds up to 110mph. This improvement will eliminate the decades-old bottleneck all trains operating west and north of Albany now experience and it will also allow for the future expansion of service to both Buffalo and Saratoga. This \$91.2 million project, which includes new interlockings, signals and grade crossing enhancements, is expected to get underway in mid-2012.

* Construction of the fourth boarding track at the Rensselaer station, a project which totals \$35.4 million and includes the extension of the current platforms to accommodate longer trains; the complete re-configuration of the station's track layout and a new signal/interlocking system, which will increase speeds of trains moving in and out of the station. Work is slated to start in 2012.

* Burying approximately 48 miles of signal code lines south from the Rensselaer station on the Hudson line (\$18.6 million). These signal cables are currently mounted on poles along the right-of-way and are extremely susceptible to weather-caused damage, resulting in slow orders and delays. The funds to bury the remaining 19 miles of pole-mounted lines north of Poughkeepsie have been awarded but are NOT yet released. This work is also expected to get underway in 2012.

Bruce Becker

New York State Walloped by Major Storms

What were likely the worst two-weeks of heavy rains and flooding in recent memory for Eastern New York caused massive damage and disruption to all modes of ground transportation, with passenger and freight rail operations particularly hard hit across the region.

The string of weather-related problems for Amtrak's New York State services started on Saturday, August 27, as Hurricane Irene approached the Northeast U.S. coast. In preparation for the storm, Metro North suspended all service at noon that day, which meant that Amtrak had to follow suit, with the few trains they did operate all terminating at Rensselaer by mid-afternoon. The storm's unprecedented heavy rains hit New York State that Saturday evening and continued through Sunday. Flood waters reached depths of over 10 feet above the rails in some locations and numerous washouts damaged both Metro North's Hudson Line to Poughkeepsie and the CSX line used by Amtrak from there as far west as Utica. At Amsterdam, the raging waters of the Mohawk River reached over 4 feet up the walls of the station building.

Metro North's ex-Erie line to Port Jervis suffered perhaps the most catastrophic damage, with full service restoration now not expected until December. The Canadian Pacific and Vermont Railways lines were also hard hit.

Amtrak service slowly resumed as repairs were made, but full operations west of Albany did not return until the following Sunday, September 4!

(Cont'd on page 7)



High water mark on the Amsterdam station

The View from the Cab

Finally, the words we have been waiting so long to hear!

The funds allowing for the start of work on the absolutely most vital incremental improvement projects have been released and construction should be well underway next year at this time.

The keystone of these projects will be the new second main track between Albany and Schenectady. EPSA has advocated for this critical improvement for its entire 31 years as an organization and soon we will be able to see the fruits of our labors; two trains passing at 110mph, along the same route where the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad first introduced rail service to our state in 1831! This work, coupled with the new station in Schenectady, the added platform capacity at Rensselaer and a modern, all-weather signal system along the Hudson line will benefit every passenger who rides Amtrak trains here in New York State.

It has been a long time coming and our thanks go out to everyone who has helped get us this far, including our friends at the FRA, Amtrak, CSX and NYSDOT. And we must also thank Senator Schumer and Representative Slaughter for their dogged pursuit to ensure that the funds were obligated as quickly as possible.

And we should take a moment to congratulate ourselves, on being the consistent and persistent voice for the needs of the passengers! It is certainly good to see our efforts finally pay off!

But we can't rest on our laurels...As is painfully obvious, no money has yet been obligated for any track-related improvement projects west of Hoffmans along the busy CSX mainline across the state. Clearly, agreements have not yet been reached between CSX, FRA and NYSDOT over top speeds and service outcomes.

But to have Hoffmans become the dividing line between fast, reliable service serving the eastern part of the state and status-quo, slow, unreliable and inconsistent service to the west is simply not acceptable. If the full potential of the Empire Corridor is ever to be reached, a rational and reasoned approach to incremental improvements for this vital, shared-use rail artery has to be agreed upon. No one party will get everything they seek; only intelligent compromise will provide for the necessary additional capacity and higher performance which will benefit both passenger and freight operations in the long run.

That being said, our "Ninety Now..." policy statement, in support of phased, increased speeds, with the first step being to attain 90mph top speeds for passenger trains on the CSX line, is more important than ever before. This is a rational approach that is attainable and we must continue to spread this message when and wherever possible.

To that end, we are offering stickers with just that message...

If you would like a supply to pass out in your area, please let me know and I'll happily send some along to you. The more "Ninety Now..." is recognized



as the best near-term solution, the better the chances are we will see meaningful improvements move ahead.

As always, never hesitate to let me know how we're doing or to offer suggestions on what our organization could do better...

Amtrak Makes Significant Economic Impact in New York State

We often hear statistics about Amtrak's on-time performance, the number of sold-out trains and that Albany-Rensselaer is the 9th busiest station in the country. But we don't hear much about the positive economic impact Amtrak has on New York State. Here are some figures I gleaned from deep within Amtrak's website:

During Fiscal Year 2010, Amtrak placed orders valued at \$81,035,100 for goods and services in New York State. Nearly half of this amount was spent in Upstate New York (north of Westchester County). The largest of these expenditures were in the Capital Region and in the Rochester area, with approximately eight million dollars being spent in each of those two areas.

It should also be noted that on July 23, 2010, Amtrak announced an order of 130 new single-level rail cars to support its long-distance train services. The five-year, \$298.1 million contract was awarded to CAF USA, of Elmira Heights, NY. The contract is creating 575 jobs to perform manufacturing and final assembly work. Expected delivery of the first car is in October 2012.

At the end of FY10, Amtrak employed 1,556 New York residents. Total wages of Amtrak employees living in New York were \$102,921,641 during FY10.

All of the economic activity created by Amtrak through wages and contracts in New York is multiplied as this money is spent to pay rents, to purchase homes and automobiles, and to buy food and clothing. It amounts to a very large and important part of the New York State economy.

And, of course, none of this takes into account the economic advantages which are realized by having passenger rail travel available to New York residents and New York businesses.

Tim Truscott

Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's new Empire District Customer Service Quality Supervisor Jay Green wants to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Jay welcomes our input, as the entire Empire Corridor team strives to provide the best service possible. Please send your written trip reports and comments, including specific dates, train numbers, stations and employee names as appropriate to Jay at: Jay Green, Customer Service Quality Supervisor, Amtrak 525 East Street Rensselaer, NY 12144 jay.green@amtrak.com

Please also send a copy to Bruce Becker, so we can track trip experiences and follow up as necessary. Thanks for your help...

Receive the ESPA Express earlier and help us go 'Green'!

For members providing their e-mail address, the ESPA Newsletter will be-mailed at the same time it is forwarded to the printer enabling you to receive the newsletter one to two weeks earlier than by mail. The postage savings can be used for passenger rail advocacy. E-mail address submitted will only be used by ESPA. Send e-mail address to www.rwlenz@aol.com.

Summer Ridership Softens in New York – August Storms had Major Impact

Combined ridership statistics for the past three summer months (June – August 2011) were a mixed bag for the trains that serve New York State.

For the three month summer period, the *Ethan Allen Express* led the route segments, with overall total combined ridership up 2.4% over the same period in 2010. Hudson Valley trains followed, with a modest 1.1% increase for the period. The *Adirondack* experienced an overall 2.1% decrease in riders for the three months and the West of Albany trains came in last, with a 5.8% drop for the period. The long-distance *Lake Shore Limited's* ridership was also down 3.2% for the summer.

The late August service curtailments due to the damage from Hurricane Irene had a significant negative impact in New York State. Overall NYS ridership for August was down 7.5% from the prior year, while overall revenues were down only 1.0%. The west of Albany trains, which were suspended for the last five days of the month, suffered the biggest ridership decrease, off 12.5% from August 2010.

These cancellations also negatively impacted this year's ridership to the New York State Fair, with less than 300 passengers taking advantage of the special Fair service.

Fortunately, the FY '11 year-to-date (October 2010 through August 2011) statistics still show a very respectable 5.1% overall ridership increase. For the full 11 month period, the West of Albany trains are up 6.8%; the *Adirondack* is up 5.7%; the Hudson Valley trains are up 4.4% and the *Ethan Allen* is up 2.5%. The *Lake Shore's* ridership is also up 7.1% so far for the year.

This summer's on time performance has been negatively affected by both programmed track work and the August storms. By route segment, the preliminary August OTP results were:

- For all Empire Service trains (both those operating West of Albany and in the Hudson Valley) - 82.6% on time
- *Adirondack* – 56.1% on time
- *Ethan Allen Express* – 44.2% on time
- *Maple Leaf* – 39.3% on time
- *Lake Shore Limited* – 35.3% on time

Bruce B. Becker

Empire Travel Tips and Discounts

* Check out the ESPA Web Site (www.esparail.org) for a direct link to the Amtrak 2011 'ILOVENY' 15% Discount Reservation page.

* All Empire Corridor trains require reservations. While advance reservations are encouraged, last minute passengers will always be accommodated if space is available on a particular train. Booking as early as possible will provide the best possible fare. Amtrak accepts reservations up to 11 months in advance of your travel date! Travel during off-peak periods (mid-week, early morning or late evening) will generally be the least expensive.

* AAA and NARP members receive 10% off most regular fares, with a three day advance purchase requirement. Senior citizens, veterans and many students can receive a 15% discount off most fares.

* Visit www.amtrak.com and select 'Hot Deals' for the latest discount program information. Select Empire Corridor trains are now being featured as part of Amtrak's 'Weekly Specials', offered for sale every Tuesday through Friday.

* Join the Amtrak Guest Rewards program and earn points towards free travel and more.

“Great Dome” Returns to *Adirondack* Service

Amtrak's "Great Dome" car will return to the *Adirondack* service for the fifth year on September 15, 2011. Albany-Montreal passengers will enjoy the spectacular view of fall foliage in New York northbound on Thursdays, Saturdays and Mondays and southbound on Fridays, Sundays and Tuesdays until October 23rd. There is no extra charge to ride in the dome car and seats are not reserved. There will be no dome car service on Wednesdays.

The refurbished vintage car dates back to 1955 and has a dome section that runs the full length of the car, a rare feature, even when dome cars were more numerous on railroad passenger service. The car features an upper level with windows on all sides as well as overhead. Renovated in 1985 and refurbished in 1999, the dome was used on the Amtrak *Auto Train* from Washington, DC to Orlando, Florida until 1994. In recent years, the dome has seen regular use on the west coast *Pacific Surfliners* and charter and excursion service. One rail fan website is reporting that the Dome car has been repainted in the Amtrak Phase 3 livery.

Ridership on the *Adirondack* service continues to be strong with passenger counts approaching their highest totals in years. From October 2010 to May 2011, passenger numbers were up 10.7 percent over the prior year.

The National Park Service Trails and Rails program usually provides personnel to ride the dome and explain the scenic and historic locations along the route.

The *Adirondack* service has been supported with New York State funding throughout its existence. State Transportation Department officials point out that the *Adirondack* provides an important link between two international cities and promotes the New York tourism industry.

Following its New York visit, the dome car will operate on the *Cardinal* between Washington and Chicago. The Dome will run eastbound from Chicago on October 29th and November 5th and westbound from Washington on November 4th and November 11th.

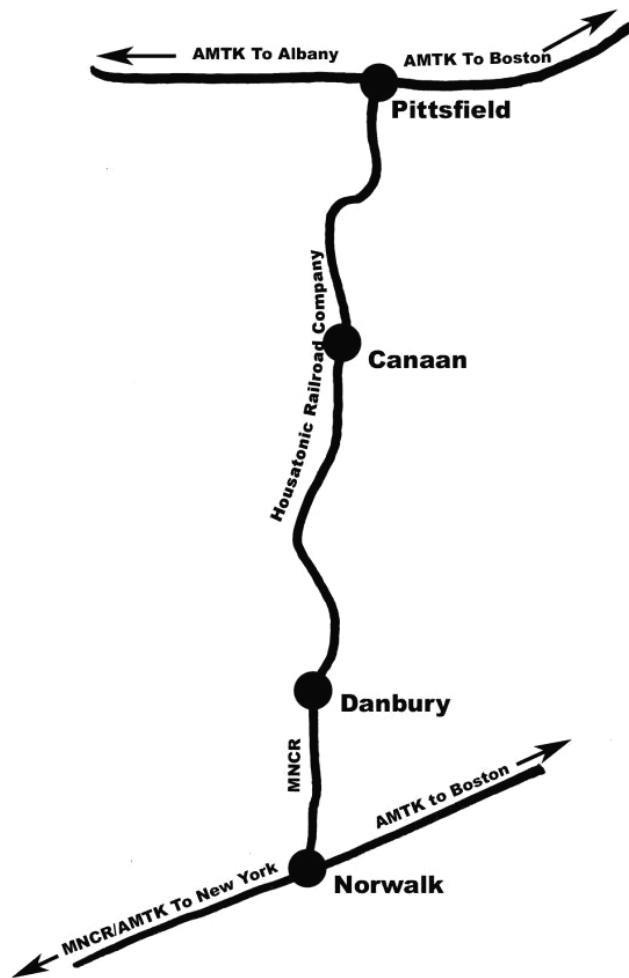
Anthony Rudmann



Amtrak Anniversary train (right) at Albany

Housatonic Railroad Considers Passenger Service

The Housatonic Railroad of Canaan, Ct. released a passenger study of their corridor between Pittsfield, MA and Danbury, CT. on August 23, 2011.



The study was conducted by Williams College economist Stephen Sheppard. Newspaper and media reports cited the economic benefits of the proposed new service concluding that job growth and regional economic vitality would be greatly enhanced. The study concluded that the rail service would bring 610 long-term jobs to Massachusetts and Connecticut. The three-year construction project would also bring in about 730 construction jobs.

The proposal calls for upgrades to track, the purchase of new rolling stock and station construction along the 89 mile route between Danbury and Pittsfield. The service proposal is interesting in that a new intercity service is being proposed here that does not involve Amtrak. The study looked at connectivity for through service to New York City using the Metro North connection at Danbury. Passengers can connect to the Northeast Corridor in Norwalk for through service to Boston, New York or Washington.

The Housatonic Railroad estimates it will cost \$200 million to upgrade the railroad and stations, construct new facilities and

purchase rolling stock. The Railroad calls for financing to be in place within two years to have the service up and running in five years. The Railroad has said that the service will be self sustaining and not require an operating subsidy!

The financing of this proposal will undoubtedly prove to be a difficult challenge for the railroad. Housatonic Railroad has shown a great deal of optimism by pressing this service proposal forward in these uncertain times. Perhaps in the years ahead we can anticipate that our regional short line carriers will come forward with innovative proposals like this one to increase the reach of our passenger railway system and provide much needed system expansion without the involvement of Amtrak.

Ben Gottfried

ESPA Visits Congress

The 'Day on the Hill' is a highlight of the Spring NARP meeting and was particularly critical this year, as there are a number of newly-elected members of the House from New York State who needed to be informed of the importance of passenger rail service for the travelers of the state.

In spite of a very busy day on the floor of both chambers, the NYS advocacy delegation was able to visit with the staffs of Republicans Nan Hayworth (NY-19); Chris Gibson (NY-20); Richard Hanna (NY-24); Ann Marie Buerkle (NY-25) and Tom Reed (NY-29).

All of the visits were favorable (with the exception of the stop at Rep. Buerkle's office). Of particular note was the positive discussion held with Tom Reed's transportation staff person, who noted that Mr. Reed is fully supportive of making reasonable incremental improvements along the Empire Corridor, which mirrors ESPA's position. Mr. Reed however is **NOT** in favor of the huge capital investment which would be needed for true high-speed rail, unless objective studies indicate that such a system would greatly benefit the public and be financially feasible/sustainable. The staff person noted that Mr. Reed is very much aware of the employment in his district provided by rail car manufacturers Alstom and CAF (which is currently building 130 long distance cars for Amtrak).

Unfortunately, the visit with the transportation staff person for Ann Marie Buerkle was a disappointment. As articulated by the staffer, Rep. Buerkle sees little or no value in the Amtrak service provided in her district at Syracuse and would very willingly vote to curtail all operating support for Amtrak as a means to reduce the federal deficit. He stated that unless Amtrak at least breaks even, it should be eliminated. Amazingly during our rather heated discussion, the staffer argued that the Air Traffic Control system is not funded (i.e. subsidized) by the federal government, but rather fully paid for by the airlines (which is absolutely incorrect). The only ray of hope was that the staffer did say that in very limited cases, there may be a role for federal capital investment in rail infrastructure which would benefit the movement of freight, and thus indirectly passengers.

While those in our group had never before encountered such open hostility towards Amtrak and passenger rail, it was never the less an interesting and valuable insight into the thinking of the newly-elected far right-wing 'Tea Party' supported members of Congress.

Bruce B. Becker

News in Brief

On Board Wi-Fi Service Coming Soon... Amtrak is in the final phases of preparing to introduce complimentary Wi-Fi internet access on board all Empire Corridor trains, which is now planned to start in mid to late-October. After it proved extremely popular on the Acela Express, Amtrak committed last year to adding this popular passenger-service amenity to all of its services in the northeast and the necessary equipment has now been added to Amfleet One cars operating on trains across the region. The required Wi-Fi equipment has not yet been installed in the other cars in Amtrak's fleet, so long distance trains will not be included in this fall's roll-out. And with Amfleet II coaches assigned to both the *Maple Leaf* and *Adirondack*, it is currently unclear what level of Wi-Fi service will be offered on these two trains. Watch for more information on this great improvement in the coming weeks.

Amtrak's Newly-Renovated Viewliner Diner #8400, named the '*Indianapolis*', will shortly be entering service on the *Lake Shore Limited*. This long-stored car was brought back to life by the craftsman of Amtrak's Beech Grove Shops and features an entirely new dining room and kitchen interior, along with energy-efficient LED lighting. Reportedly, the first of Amtrak's new, single-level, dining cars being built by CAF in Elmira Heights, NY, due out in late 2012, will be named the '*Albany*'.

New Round of Empire Corridor Environmental Impact Statement Public Meetings Expected... The ongoing EIS process for the Empire Corridor is moving ahead on schedule. The Draft EIS statement is expected to be released by the end of this year and in advance of this, a new round of public information meetings are expected to be held across the state later this fall. Watch the ESPA web site and your local media for the locations and times of these vital meetings being held in your area.

ESPA Promotes NYS HSR at Washington Event ESPA member Steve Strauss, now a Washington, DC resident, recently coordinated the printing of lapel stickers promoting ESPA and Higher Speed Rail for New York State. On September 21, Steve distributed the stickers at the annual 'Buffalo Night in Washington' reception, held each September for Western New Yorker's now living and working in the DC area. Steve noted that the attendee response was very positive from both the Congressional staff members and others who participated.

NYS High Speed Rail Planning Board Remains in Limbo... To date, there has still been **NO** public information released concerning the High Speed Rail Planning Board, which was created by then Governor Paterson and the state legislature in mid-2010. Reportedly some appointments to the Board have been made, but no meetings have been held. ESPA continues to monitor this matter closely.

Reminder...NYS High Speed Rail Project and Progress Summaries are now available on the ESPA web site, www.esparail.org. These lists, which will be updated regularly, contain full information on all the state-wide Intercity Passenger Rail improvement projects currently funded (from a combination of federal, state and local sources) and the progress of each project.

Saratoga - North Creek Scenic Railroad: *A First Hand Report*

Each train set consists of a locomotive, two coach cars, and a dome car. Northbound the best scenery (the river) is on the right side, and opposite on the return. I rode the dome car north and a coach car south. Disadvantage of the Matanuska dome car is that it is 24 years old and the windows are cloudy from age. Also, some of the seats face inward, a peculiar configuration for an observation car. I preferred the coach because the windows were clearer, and if you are alone, you are not forced to sit with strangers.

North Creek was the original terminus of the first railroad built in the Adirondacks by Dr. Thomas C. Curan. History buffs know that it was to the North Creek RR station that then Vice President Theodore Roosevelt rode from Mount Marcy after the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901. The station was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and consists of four rooms including separate men & women's waiting area, station master's office and baggage room. There is a wonderful operating model train exhibit depicting the time when the Delaware & Hudson railroad served the area.

North Creek is thankfully free of the honky-tonk of Lake George Village with its T-shirt shops, kitsch souvenirs and fast food chains. The hamlet has locally owned restaurants, bistros, tapa bars, arts & crafts shops. There is ample time for lunch and a walk during the layover between trains.

Scenic rides will continue until October 30th. From December to March ski trains will operate to Gore Mountain and other resorts in the North Country. A good time to travel would be during Autumn peak foliage.

Reservations can be made on line @ snccr.com. The website is user friendly and telephone inquiries were promptly answered by helpful customer service representatives. The toll free number is 877-726-7245.

As rail advocates we should remember that our national system, Amtrak, is a fusion of many independent operators who in their time and place provided quality service. Those who treasure our rail heritage should patronize and support the few remnants of that history.

My only caveat is that there are still mechanical issues to be resolved. The southbound train was delayed two hours by an electrical generator fault that stopped the A/C. Reliability must be improved if it is to connect with trains in Saratoga, although Amtrak is not punctual, either.

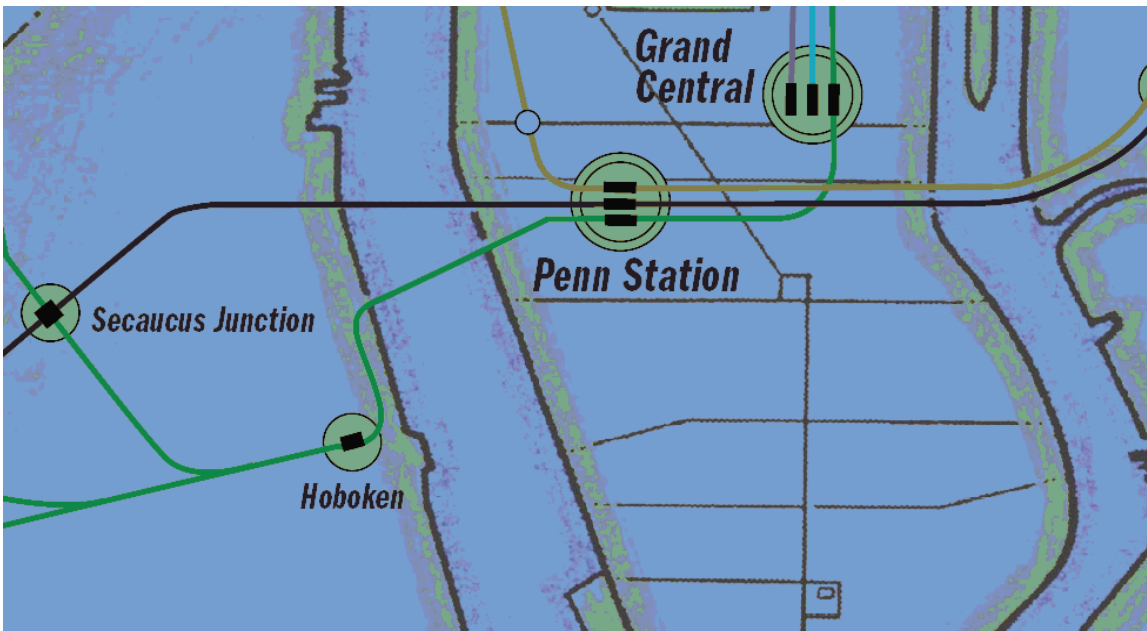
My hope is that SNCRR will allow the scenery and history to be the prime attractions, and not hoke it up with silly theme rides like The Train Robbery, Santa Run, Halloween Horrors, and other detritus of modern marketing.

I recommend this trip as a very pleasant way to spend a day.

Jim Bailey

Schenectady ESPA member Bailey rode the train July 28th-Ed.





Local Officials call for study of Hoboken Alternative for new Hudson River Passenger Rail Tunnels

City officials in Jersey City and Hoboken have requested that NJ Transit planners take a fresh look at routing the new ARC Hudson River passenger rail tunnels by way of Hoboken Terminal. The Hoboken routing allows Manhattan-bound trains to make an on-line station stop at Hoboken, enhancing access to New Jersey's most important business district -- the Hudson River waterfront -- and connecting with the Hudson-Bergen light rail line. The routing efficiently uses existing rail infrastructure while avoiding adverse environmental impacts in the Hackensack Meadowlands.

NJ Transit officials gave this alternative little serious consideration in 2005, when the cities first proposed it during the Environmental Impact Analysis phase of the ARC project. At that time NJ Transit was already committed to a plan that would add tracks to the existing NEC route through Secaucus. By some accounts, the Hoboken routing would have saved from one-half to two-thirds of the cost of the NJ Transit plan, which ultimately became unaffordable and was finally discarded by NJ Governor Chris Christie.

As shown in the illustration above, the Hoboken Alternative becomes the centerpiece of a plan for remaking the region's three commuter rail lines and Amtrak into a coordinated **Regional Rail System** -- with frequent service, integrated fares and thru-running. The first phase would be to construct new Hudson River passenger rail tunnels linking Hoboken with Penn Station, NY, with the second phase continuing on to Grand Central Terminal.

Thru-running increases capacity and connectivity. The Penn Station-Grand Central connection allows west of Hudson residents to reach destinations in East Midtown, the largest concentration of office buildings in the nation. This connection also makes it easier for Bronx, Westchester and Connecticut residents to reach the growing West Midtown area. It also permits Empire Service trains to be routed via Grand Central and then Penn Station, continuing on to Philadelphia and Washington.

Another important element of this the plan is a two-track connection from Amtrak's Empire Service line into Penn

Station, removing the single-track bottleneck and permitting a much higher level of regional rail service on this line. New stairways and wider concourses are critical to rebuilding Penn Station into a suitable gateway to NYC.

Amtrak has shown no interest in the Hoboken Alternative, preferring a routing adjacent to its existing line via Secaucus. Amtrak estimates that its plan, now renamed "Gateway II", would cost even more to construct than the failed ARC plan. The Amtrak plan does

not include the cost of a "loop-de-loop" Secaucus connection which would have permitted one-seat ride train service from Orange and Rockland Counties. The Hoboken Alternative provides a more direct route to Manhattan from these counties without any significant expenditure of resources.

In the meantime, PB Consulting is completing its study of Mayor Bloomberg's plan to extend the #7 Subway to Secaucus. The Mayor's plan is likely to cost more than the Hoboken Alternative. Regional rail advocates favor construction of new passenger rail tunnels to Manhattan, avoiding a transfer to the subway in Secaucus, where few destinations are within walking distance of the station.

An interconnected **Regional Rail System** provides an attractive alternative to driving on crowded highways that cannot be expanded and increases the economic viability of the region in the face of growing global competition. However, for an interconnected plan to be advanced, all parties need to work together to achieve common goals. This is especially essential now, with legislative gridlock in Washington making it unlikely that large amounts of Federal funding will become available.

The Hoboken-Penn Station-Grand Central plan was featured in an exhibit first shown at the Municipal Art Society in 2006 "*Making the Connection*". The full exhibit is posted on the www.irum.org website. Take a look! ESPA was a major financial contributor to the exhibit.

For more information about ESPA activities downstate, visit the Regional Rail Working Group (RRWG) website at www.rrwg.org. Rail advocates continue to meet monthly at the Hoboken City Hall. All are welcome. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 28, 2011 6-8pm.

Also, rail advocates may find the next several Auto-Free New York/vision42 working group meetings of interest. Representatives from three of the world's largest rail car manufacturing firms will make presentations about their latest light rail products at the Van Alan Institute 30 W. 22nd St. 6th Floor--Bombardier presented on Tuesday, September 20; , Siemens will present on Tuesday, November 15, 2011 6-8pm and Alstom on Tuesday, December 20, 2011 6-8pm

For more information contact George Haikalis -- 212-475-3394 or geo@irum.org www.irum.org

Grants to Boost Keystone Corridor Train Speeds to 125 mph

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced that work can begin on closing the last three highway-rail grade crossings on the Keystone corridor with the signing of \$24.3 million in grant agreements between the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Eliminating the grade crossings, areas where a highway and a railroad cross at the same level, will improve safety and allow future train speeds to increase from 110 mph to 125 mph.

“We are committed to the President’s vision of a world-class rail network providing fast, efficient and affordable service,” said Secretary LaHood. “Closing these highway-rail grade crossings will allow travelers along the heavily-used Keystone corridor to enjoy a reduction in their trip time with future train speeds boosted to 125-mph.”

The Keystone corridor operates between New York, Philadelphia and Harrisburg and is Amtrak’s fourth most heavily traveled route. Since train speeds along the route were increased to 110 mph in 2006, ridership has grown by more than 37 percent to 1,227,075 passengers in 2010. The grants announced today will eliminate grade crossings in Mount Joy Borough, Rapho Township and Leacock Township, all in Lancaster County, PA. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and Amtrak will also contribute a combined \$3.4 million for this project.

“Closing highway-rail grade crossings eliminates potential accidents,” said Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo. “We must keep safety at the forefront in the high-speed and intercity passenger rail program.”

Funding also includes engineering and environmental work for the redesign of track crossings and improvements to train control signal systems.

A strict “Buy America” requirement for high-speed rail projects ensures that U.S. manufacturers and workers will receive the maximum economic benefits from this federal investment. In 2009, Secretary LaHood secured a commitment from 30 foreign and domestic rail manufacturers to employ American workers and locate or expand their base of operations in the U.S. if they are selected for high-speed-rail contracts.

U.S. Department of Transportation Office of Public Affairs

Success at Long Last (Cont’d from page 1)

* The construction of new platforms and the re-configuration of the track layout at the Schenectady station, totaling \$4.1 million. This work is part of the overall project to construct a new intermodal station on the site, which is now fully-funded and is expected to open in 2014.

These projects, when completed, will have a significant, positive impact on the performance of every train operating along the Empire Corridor and will serve as the foundation for future service expansions and reduced trip times.

The announcement leaves only four specific, previously awarded, projects not yet obligated:

* The above referenced 19 miles of signal work north of Poughkeepsie - \$8.0m federal with a \$2.0m state match - \$10.0m total cost

* Grade crossing improvements between Poughkeepsie and Rensselaer - \$2.5m in federal funds

* The capacity related improvements in the Syracuse area - \$18.6m federal with a \$4.6m state match - \$23.2m total cost

* The proposed, initial 11-mile section of new, high speed, track on the CSX right-a-way west of Rochester - \$58.0m federal

With these obligations, the federal government, since the start of the Obama Administration, has funded, through a number of programs, a total of \$553.7 million in rail projects which are now occurring in New York State. Outside of the Empire Corridor, these include the \$275 million project to reconfigure the Harold Interlocking on Long Island and \$83 million for the first phase of the Moynihan Station project. A total of \$174.4 million has directly funded projects around the state outside of the NYC metro area.

2012 should be a very busy construction year around the state, as these four projects get underway, in addition to the delayed start of renovations at the Buffalo-Depew station and the construction of 2 miles of new main track on the CP Rail line near Ballston Spa.

ESPA will keep close tabs on the progress of these important projects and we will provide frequently updated status reports on our web site as work gets underway. *Bruce B. Becker*

New York State Walloped (Cont’d from page 1)

Then on Sunday evening, September 5, service west of Albany was again interrupted when a small tornado brought down trees, power lines and the signal system west of Amsterdam overnight. And on Wednesday morning, September 7, Hudson Valley service was delayed for several hours when trees fell across the tracks near Hudson.

If all this was not bad enough, the remnants of Tropical Storm Lee then descended on the Mohawk Valley region on Thursday, September 8, leading to new massive flooding and washouts on CSX between Hoffmans and Utica. Amtrak was forced to again cancel all trains across upstate NY, as new repairs were made. Fortunately the *Adirondack*, *Ethan Allen* and most trains in the Hudson Valley continued to run. Partial service west of Albany resumed on Saturday, September 10, but was quickly curtailed again when the water-eroded supports for a high-tension power line east of Amsterdam collapsed, bringing live wires down onto the right-of-way. Full service to Buffalo and the west was finally resumed on Tuesday, September 13, though slow-orders and delays continued as CSX crews worked to complete repairs along the hardest-hit 40 miles of the ex-NYC mainline.

All in all, Amtrak responded to this string of service disruptions well, particularly given that the option of providing alternate bus transportation was impossible for many days during both floods due to the closure of the parallel Thruway in the Mohawk Valley. Metro North and CSX both mustered massive repair efforts and given the scope of the damage, restored service in remarkably short order after each crisis. However, with all this being said, CSX was quite slow in allowing Amtrak to resume full operations through the flood-affected sections once the line re-opened and Amtrak then choose not to add available extra cars to the initial few trains which CSX permitted them to operate, and thus Amtrak was unable to accommodate at least some displaced passengers. *Bruce B. Becker*

2011 ESPA Working Group Meeting Dates

If you would like to become more active in ESPA, these 'working group' meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how YOU can make a difference! ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 716-741-6384 or bbecker@esparail.org, for more information or if you are planning to attend a meeting. Advance registration is required!

Saturday, November 19, 2011 Schenectady – Backstage
Pub 12:00n - 4:00pm

Saturday, January 21, 2012 Schenectady – Backstage
Pub 12:00n - 4:00pm

Saturday, March 10, 2012 **2012 Annual Membership Meeting** - Schenectady

Check www.esparail.org, for the most current information on meeting times and venues...**ALL dates, locations and times are subject to change...**

ESPA/NARP Member

If you are a member of both ESPA and NARP you can save \$5 when renewing your ESPA membership.
(Renew for \$19 instead of the regular \$24).

ESPA MEMBERSHIP NEW OR RENEWAL

The Empire State Passengers Association is a volunteer network of people working to improve intercity rail, mass transit and bus service in New York State.

- Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year)
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- Patron membership (\$75.00)
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)
- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)

Please make checks/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA c/o Andrew Cabal, P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209.

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 716-759-2315. e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for November/December issue is October 31, 2011. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.

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